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SUBJECT: GUATEMALA: BERGER REPLACES MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT

REF: GUATEMALA 494 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador James Derham, reason: 1.4 (d)

11. (SBU) President Berger announced on March 26 that he had accepted the resignation of Minister of Government (Interior) Carlos Vielmann as well as those of Civilian National Police (PNC) Director General Erwin Sperissen and Prison System Director Victor Rosales. On March 27, Berger named Adela Torrebiarte as the new Minister of Government. Vielmann was censured last week with a no confidence vote by the Guatemalan Congress in response to the worsening situation of citizen security, which was dramatically highlighted by the murder of three Salvadoran legislators and their driver/bodyguard in late February (reftel).

12. (SBU) Torrebiarte is a member of the Security Advisory Council (CAS), a group formed under the auspices of the Peace Accords to provide advice to the GOG on security issues. During the past two years, CAS has developed and presented to the Berger Administration proposals to reform the PNC and create a national security council. Following the scandal over the assassination of three Salvadoran parliamentarians and their driver/bodyguard, and the subsequent murder of the suspected culprits, the Berger Administration has expressed greater willingness to consider the CAS proposals for security reform. Torrebiarte told reporters she will press for police reform during the remaining nine months of the Berger Administration.

13. (C) Torrebiarte, who will celebrate her 58th birthday on March 30, is one of the principal leaders of Anguished Mothers, an anti-crime NGO founded by upper class women in May 1995 in response to a surge in the number of kidnappings. Anguished Mothers has been involved in security issues since its inception, with a special interest in police reform, and works closely with the PNC. Torrebiarte is also well-known for her involvement in football; she was the president of the Guatemalan Football League from 2000 to 2003. She hails from an important private sector family and her nomination for the post ensures that private sector influence over security matters will not be disrupted with the departure of Vielmann.
Derham